ARAMBEE FLAME

Vol. II No. 6 Dec. 1981

THE HAITIAN REFUGEES

Recently I received a letter from a friend of mine. In the letter she expressed considerable anger about the Reagan administration's stance with regard the question of the Haitian refugees. Like many other American-born Afrikans, she was of the view that the Haitain "boat people" are having such difficulty getting political asylum in the U.S. because of white racism on the part of the Reagan administration.

There is little doubt that our dear president is a racist. But to see the Haitian question only as one of racism is to miss the boat, so to speak. Are not the VietNamese non-white, most of the Cubans? Yet neither of these groups have had the difficulty getting into the U.S. as have the Haitians. This fact should lead us past the question of race. If past the question of race, then where to?

In what important way does Haiti differ from, for example, the People's Republic of VietNam and Cuba? Haiti is a pro-U.S., capitalist country. It is one of a number of neo-colonies of the U.S., meaning that its government and economy are dependent upon U.S. aid for their continued existence. The Duvalier regime in Haiti is kept in power only through brute force, the resources for which come mainly from the U.S. It is a ruthless regime which address political dissent with imprisonment, torture, and murder. Its economic structure is the classic neo-colonial, capitalist structure in which a few families hold the lion's share of the wealth while the vast majority of the people stumble on the edge of survival.

In the past several weeks, a day has not gone by in which we've not heard some hypocritical reports in the press about the suspension of civil and human rights in Poland. But we hear nothing of the long-standing denial of these rights in Haiti by the U.S.-supported Haitian government. The reason for this silence is the same for U.S. refusal generally to grant political asylum to Haitian refugees. It is international politics and image-maintenance on the part of the U.S.

Were the U.S. to either be critical of Haitian government policies or grant political asylum to the Haitian "boat people," it would be acknowledging to the international community that Haiti has a corrupt and totalitarian government, and the fact that the government is maintained by U.S. support would make the U.S. look very hypocritical indeed as an alleged champion of human rights. In attacking the U.S.S.R. for its apparent involvement in the affairs of Poland, the U.S. would be doing so with, as folks say, "egg on its face."

Conversely, the U.S. has generally welcomed the refugees from Cuba and VietNam, though both the Cubans(generally) and the VietNamese are non-white people. The welcome mat for people from these countries has been out because there is propaganda benefit to be derived. Both the People's Republic of VietNam and Cuba claim to be socialist and are both opposed in general to capitalism and to U.S. policies as a whole. In the world of international politics, every event is seen by the "super-powers" as potential propaganda material. Thus, when a person flees a country that is in one sphere of influence and asks the government of a country in an opposing sphere of influence for political asylum, the government of

the host country is enabled to use its granting of political asylum as a political statement: "You see, world, how terrible that system is that people are leaving it to join our wonderful system."

The main purpose of this treatment of the Haitian question has been to underline the importance of looking past the surface of things. Though many things in this world are simple, many other things are complex, often the very things that appear to be the simplest. Race is an important rationale behind many policies of the U.S. government but is by no means the only one. And we cannot properly deal with our racist oppression unless we can also grasp the roles played by economic, political, and other factors. A tiger with narrow vision suffers many bumps on the sides of its head.

BEAUTY

You should not use outward aids to make yourselves beautiful, such as the way you fix your hair or the jewelry you put on or the dresses you wear.

Instead, your beauty should consist in/ emanate from your inner self. The ageless beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of the greatest value in the sight of the devout women of the past who placed their hope and beauty of themselves.

So close your heart to every love but mine. Hold no one in your arms but me.

-Henry McCray

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Nebraska State Pen Art Guild will have its annual exhibit/sale at the University of Nebraska at Omaha from January 22-25. Contact Karen Marion of the United Minority Students(554-2345) at the university for more details.

OVERTONE SERIES is planning a prisoners' anthology as part of the Series and is presently collecting work. Send poems, short stories, essays, graphics, etc. to:

Editor
OVERTONE SERIES
4421 Chestnut St.
Philadelphia, PA.
19104

BENCH PRESS has published a book of poems by H.L. "Wili" Otey, a prisoner on death row here at the Nebraska State Pen. For information, contact either Brother Otey or Bill Roundey c/o

BENCH PRESS
Box 2500
Lincoln, Neb.
68502

.....
.....

The FLAME is published monthly by the Harambee Afrikan Cultural Organization. It is an effort on our part to both provide education to our members and to the few number of other American-born Afrikans that we can afford to send this newsletter to and provide a vehicle for self-expression to those of our Brothers and Sisters who wish to share their ideas with others.

H.A.C.O. meets every Monday. At our six o'clock meetings, which occur every other Monday, guests from outside the pen may attend and we urge you to do. To be placed on the outside guest list, either write to Chairman Chico Wilson or Educational Chairman David L. Rice at P.O. Box 2500; Lincoln, Neb.; 68502 or call the sponsor, Scott Marshall at 471-3161, ext. 380.

To submit articles, poetry, etc., send them to Editor

Harambee FLAME
P.O. Box 2500
Lincoln, Neb.
68502

Subscription rate for the FLAME is $6.00 per year(12 issues). We need your subscriptions.

-Editor, David L. Rice

FROM OTHER SOURCES

Haiti-"Recent reports indicate up to 40% of the foreign aid Haiti receives goes into the private bank accounts of the Duvalier family...Haiti's investment climate is regarded as one of the most favorable in the Caribbean. The minimum wage has 'officially' been set at $2.64 a day...Some 40% of the meager earnings of the urban poor goes toward cooking fuel...More than 200 U.S. companies now operate in Haiti for a total investment of about $130 million. ..The Haitian press recently reported that the U.S. is also providing support for Duvalier's antisubversive secret police force, the Leopards...'Since November 1980 hundreds of Haitians accused of communist activities have been imprisoned, tortured, exiled, or killed by the Duvalier dictatorship.'. .." --Jan. 6, 1982 edition of THE GUARDIAN

Toward War-By-Mistake-"Launch on warning is a frightening prospect--witness the 147 false alarms of atomic attack the U.S. command received during a recent eighteen-month period. Several of these were taken seriously enough for U.S. forces to take steps toward 'retaliation' before the mechanical errors were detected. Pentagon official says it is likely the Soviet warning system is at least as prone to error as our own..." --Feb. edition of THE PROGRESSIVE

Role of Black Women-"It is clear. Africa produced the first queens in the world. Africa had a matriarchal system continental-wide before its invasion. As a matter of fact, if you just look at African history-just a quick look at it-you will see that whenever the enemy invaded, and sisters were in leadership positions, there were not compromises. But, whenever the enemy invaded, and brothers were in leadership, compromises were made. Sisters must play the same role as brothers everywhere, outside of limitations, physical limitations. These limitations aren't much because sisters can do just about anything brothers can do-drive tanks, drive airplanes, become engineers, lawyers-anything." --Kwame Ture(Stokely Carmichael) from an interview in the Dec./Jan. issue of THE BLACK SCHOLAR

Keepers of the Peace-"The Tactical Unit of the Milwaukee Police Dept. was formed in the mid-1960s by Sgt. John Campbell, on orders from Milwaukee's Chief of Police Harold Breier...Breier unleashed his Tactical Unit, coupled with a massive police surveillance program, on the civil rights movement. ..The Tactical Units, shrouded in secrecy, drove unmarked squad cars and operated with a city-wide jurisdiction, not confined to any district...The Tactical Squads also possessed a wide variety of weapons, special in nature, such as concentrated chemical gas weapons, as well as sniper rifles and fully automatic assault rifles...In 1978, an ex-member of the Tactical Unit confided how the organizers of the unit had deliberately chosen 'roughnecks and rowdies' to comprise the unit. He recalled how Tactical Unit Officers saved dog and cat litter from their homes and placed the fecal material in 'Dixie Cup Bombs,' equipped with small powder charges and delayed fuses, that could be lined along a march(civil rights) route, or tossed into protesters' vehicles to harass civil rights actions." --Jan., 1982 edition of CHANGES

.....

.....

THE H.A.C.O. CREED

Together we seek to know that which is us, to expand our collective consciousness of who we are and whence we come. We exalt in the fact that Black is beautiful in its own right, rather than at the expense of any ethnic group and, in the true spirit of the Swahili word, "Harambee," promote the idea that cultural exchange is germane to human growth.

.....

.....

SURGERY WITH LIGHT

I remember my hands clinging
to a black radish.
The needle entering my breast
was a pang of light.
And the other voice in my head
yearning as my nostrils drank
the anesthesia.

My fingers were glass filaments
on the flatboard of my belly.
The operation was performed to
remove tears.
I was brave enough to hold your hand
as you spun a web of dreams
in my ear.

Cupping minutes in your fists,
you spoke of a healing language,
a salve of words to spread
over the wounds.
In seconds, the gas filled
all the cavities in my skull
with lives.

They were beautiful lives,
the kind we want
our children to live,
each one neatly bordered
with thunderclouds.
I was gasping in the chambers
of auschwitz, alone with the gas.

Children surrounded me
with staffs of light
in their hands ready to snatch the scream
from my throat.
I gave them the scorched
ruby of my heart.
History's voice is not soothing.

The voice sings of hearts
and their shadows.
These are the transparent
moments in time,
the moments that reveal the eyes
of the soul,
eyes calm as the cool surface of a pond
in spring.

You can taste eternity
on the tip of your tongue.
You do not know why the air seems to drape
around your shoulders. You can
wear it for a shroud with its fringe of stars.

. . . . . .
. "Surgery With Light" was written .
. by Beth Brown of Philadelphia, PA..
. . . . . .

A CALLOUS SUMMER

L bushels languish in brutal sun
so brutal so fierce
I as if the timelessness wired around
our backs too tight
F so bored with shame we knelt
to cross the roads
E that bounded births so far from us
we could not relieve the curse

R suspension held us in
as if there were no time
H to hold us firm
to suck our sand
Y and loose us from it .
no gulls to tap their wings
T on skies in heads so deeply forlorned
as to be capped by clouds to form
H a mist
a haze to flood our eyes
M and baskets
bushels of old corn
S mildewed with such stealth
their putrid moss goes unnoticed
and we go unmoved before their rotting
as our own sons
and daughters wilt
beneath a sultry noon.

-David L. Rice

ANNOUNCEMENT

The editor of The Universal Black Writer, a quarterly literary magazine, has asked that we notify the readers of Harambee FLAME that the magazine is seeking both submissions of writing and subscribers.

The subscription rate is $7.00 per year. Mailing address for TUBW is

EDITOR/TUBW
P.O. Box 5
Radio City Station
N.Y., N.Y. 10101